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Missionary Instruction and Religious Education

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"Under the influence of Christian teaching the child holds the supreme interest of the civilized world."

—*GEORGE P. ECKMAN*

Missionary Instruction and Religious Education

THE Church does not yet appreciate the contribution which can be made to its processes of religious education by missionary instruction. A generation or two of actual experience will be necessary for full realization, but even now some factors may be pointed out with profit.

In order to do this it is essential that we clearly understand our aim as a Church in religious educational matters. We have several organizations by which we try to fulfill our educational functions as a Church—the Sunday School, the Epworth League, the Junior League, and other societies. What are we attempting to do; or, in other words, what is the aim of these organizations?

AIM OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The objective is the individual. This must be kept constantly and clearly in mind. We are not seeking to establish formulas or customs, or even doctrines. These are often very important, but they are not half as important as

folks. The final objective is the man and his character. A proper respect for custom and history, and a clear knowledge of our faith and doctrines, are absolutely essential as means to our end, but they do not constitute an end in themselves. Girls and boys, and finally men and women with well-rounded Christian characters, constitute our final objective. That which we seek in order to develop this Christian character is the conversion of the child, his growth in Christian grace, and his training for Christian service. This is a large program, but it represents the total responsibility of the Church to the child.

Is it not true that more attention has been given to the securing of conversions and to the growth in grace than to training for service? No one would argue that less attention should be given to the former, but that more should be given to the latter. Years ago, Bishop Vincent recognized the necessity of further development along this line when he said: "It is the duty of the Church to teach what every Christian ought to know." Surely that knowledge which is essential to efficiency in fulfilling the purpose of Christ is included in "what every Christian ought to know."

THE PURPOSE OF CHRIST

The question then arises: What is the purpose of Christ? The answer which is given to this question will determine the relationship of missionary instruction to religious education. If Christ's purpose was to bring the whole world to Himself, or, in other words, if missions is an integral part of Christ's program for the Church, then missionary instruction must be given an integral place in religious education. But if missions is an optional matter, an extra notion which an over-zealous Christian may take upon himself at will, then missionary instruction may be as haphazard as any one may wish.

Granting, then, that it is the business of the Church to establish a world-wide Kingdom, let us ask what provision the Church curriculum has contained for developing Christian character with this world-wide vision. There has been some missionary instruction in the Sunday School, but in a majority of places it has been sadly neglected. There has been much mission study in the last ten years, but it has not usually been articulated with our processes of religious education.

THE GRADED LESSONS

Our greatest educational agency, the Sunday School, did not make missionary instruction a part of its regular educational work until a few years ago, when the Graded Courses were

produced with their splendid missionary lessons. Now we are teaching missions, not primarily to secure missionary offerings, but to develop Christians—well-rounded, full-orbed Christians. It is being recognized that the Church which fails to train its youth in matters of Kingdom extension fails at a most vital point. Conversion is possible without such instruction, although there have been many instances of individuals being led to Christ in America chiefly by a knowledge of the blessings which Christianity brought to heathen people. Christian growth of the right sort is improbable if divorced from instruction in missions. The narrow, selfish Christian may be developed, but our objective is that kind of a Christian who conceives his chief business to be the extension of the Kingdom. Training for Christian service without missionary instruction is impossible. It is unthinkable that a person can really serve the world who has no conception of the world's need. He can help his next-door neighbor, but Christ taught that everyone is his neighbor. Training for Christian service means training for world conquest.

UNSELFISH CHRISTIANS

What are some of the contributions which we may expect missionary instruction to make to religious education? May we not, first of all, hope that it will help in developing more unselfish Christians? The need of this is apparent

on every hand. No one will be so optimistic regarding our past success as to insist that we cannot do better at this point. And here we should employ largely those methods of education which the modern pedagogue calls "education by doing." This method of missionary education does not apply to this point only, but it applies here with special force. Unselfish instincts will grow much more readily as a result of practice in serving others than as a result of urgings and theorizing concerning kindness and helpfulness. Has not every alert teacher of boys discovered that they care little concerning his preachments about service, but that they are almost always ready to do the right thing when a real need is presented to them in the right way?

AVENUES OF SERVICE

Two definite suggestions may be helpful as illustrations. A Sunday School Superintendent recently appointed only boys and girls of the Senior Department on the Easter Decoration Committee. In outlining the work of the Committee the chief emphasis was placed upon the distribution of the flowers among the sick and shut-ins rather than upon the beautifying of the church. Just before the benediction as many as twenty boys and girls stood before the altar and were given the flowers which they were to distribute, and thus had their first experience in this sort of helpfulness. On another occasion a giving Christmas was emphasized almost to the

exclusion of a receiving Christmas so far as the Sunday School was concerned. It was declared a success by everyone, a twelve year old boy saying: "Gee! That is the best Christmas entertainment we ever had." These special seasons of the Church year may be used most advantageously for real education through service.

Another avenue of service is presented to almost every community by the presence of so many immigrants. The church will never be a missionary church as long as its members maintain the spirit that underlies the use of such terms as "Dago," "Sheeny," and "Chink." Surely in this sense missionary education should begin at Jerusalem. Actual service here is of prime necessity. A church club of boys recently gave several weeks to the study of the immigrant, discussing methods of reaching and Christianizing him in the abstract but having nothing to do with him in the concrete, and still using disrespectful terms for those foreigners in their town. By persistent effort this can be overcome. The "doing of a good turn" in these cases is the first step in missionary education. It is at this point that the genius of the Boy Scout Movement is found.

GOD IN THE WORLD

Missionary education will help us to see God's presence in the world to-day. His direction of affairs did not cease with the events recorded in the last chapter of Acts. We some-

times act as if we believe that all direct guidance in spiritual things ceased then, and that now men grope around looking for His leadership in a way not known in Bible times. This certainly cannot be true. Livingstone was led through Africa by God, just as much as Paul was led through Macedonia. God is certainly present in India to-day, picking out from that mass of ignorant and uncultured low-caste and out-caste men the leaders of His future Kingdom in that Empire. Fishermen and tax-gatherers and others who were despised were used in the first Christian century; and sweepers and beggars and those who are despised now are likewise coming to places of power in the Christian army.

Every thoughtful person must admit that God is present in China to-day, and that His spirit is working possibly even more rapidly than He did in the Roman Empire. Surely there are leaders of the Christian Church in China who are immediately influencing the march of events more than Paul moulded the nations of his day. These men are being guided by God. They do not proceed in their own strength, or their own wisdom. They are factors in the changing life of 400,000,000 people, because they are under divine leadership. That leadership is just as real and just as significant as it was in Bible times.

We have a feeling that a halo hung over the heads of the early Apostles which does not exist in our day, that Paul and Stephen and the others

had special strength for every temptation and special leadership for every problem. They did have, but no more so than the faithful of our day and generation. There seems to be a chasm here that we have not bridged. A study of the Christian movements of our times, of the men and women who are leading, will help in this particular problem and enable us to see more clearly that God is present in the world to-day, leading and guiding the builders of a great and ever-increasing Kingdom.

THE BIBLE TO-DAY

Missionary education will help us realize more fully that the Bible is *the* book of to-day. Here is a composite volume written 2000 years ago. It was written largely by a pastoral people whose chief occupation was the tending of herds. True they were in the center of some of the great national movements of their day, and were prominent in trade and commerce, but these relations, taken at their height, were small when compared with the complexity and commercialism of our times. Jerusalem to-day would be but a good sized country-town compared with New York City. This 2000 year old book: what good can it be to-day? What message can it have for us? Do the principles there enunciated apply to this age? Is the Bible of any force in the world or is it only a guide to a comparatively few individuals in matters of personal religion? These questions can only be answered by a knowledge of

the relations of the Bible to the events of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Wm. T. Ellis, the prominent newspaper correspondent, wrote an article two or three years ago on the subject, "Who Woke Up Turkey?" It was in the days of the Young Turk Movement. We all know that Turkey is not overly awake even now, yet there is a leaven there for better things even though it be very small. Mr. Ellis traces that leaven in no unmistakable way to Roberts College, of the American Congregational Church, in Constantinople.

Recall the Russo-Japanese War. One event, typical of all, will serve to illustrate. The Russian Admiral had sailed from the Black Sea to the China Sea in a last attempt to check the Japanese. He was defeated and picked up out of the water by the enemy. Japan is a heathen nation, certainly more heathen than Christian. What does a heathen nation do with a conquered general? Cut off his head and put it on a pole and parade the streets of the Capital, showing the trophies of war. But what did Japan do with that Admiral? They placed him in a hospital and, it is said, gave him better medical treatment than he could have received if he had been picked up by his own men. How did Japan happen to have a hospital? How did it come to pass that the Japanese army was the most healthy army that history has ever known? The medical science of Japan was started by a Christian missionary. It was the leaven of the Bible that

changed the barbarity of these people to the sympathy of Christians. Unconsciously they have imbibed the spirit of the great book.

It is this same power that is turning China upside down. Social and religious customs dating back to the time of Abraham are being overturned by these words of prophets and priests who received a message from God in the generations when these customs were being established. The Bible is showing that women are more valuable than the foot-binding custom; that men are worth more than the revenue of the opium traffic; that the riches of the earth if mined and developed will bring more happiness and prosperity to China than the dragon can destroy, and that Christ is greater than Confucius.

Illustrations are many but need not be multiplied. There is ample material to include in a curriculum of religious education which will emphasize this point, and if properly arranged and logically related to Bible study will help us to realize that the Bible is the indispensable book of our generation. Some have feared that it would crowd out the Bible. Not so; it will enhance appreciation of the Bible, relating it to the life and thought and movements of our time in the minds of our young people and leaving it more than ever *the* book of this generation.

LOYALTY TO THE CHURCH

Missionary education will develop loyalty to the Church. Patriotism is not an instinct, as some may believe. It is the result of an educational process. Our public schools give special attention to this as a definite object of our educational system. National holidays and birthdays of patriots are used for this definite purpose. Loyalty to the Church will not result with less care than loyalty to the State. We have given but little attention to this phase of religious education. The Sunday School curriculum of the past has omitted it almost altogether. What little has been done has been in the probationers' classes. But this has often been quite fully given over to matters of faith and church government. Church history has been almost wholly overlooked. The outstanding purpose of the Church—namely, the salvation of the whole world—seems to have taken possession of comparatively few of the Christian Church. These are largely matters of education. The fundamental purpose of the Church, the history of past failures and successes in trying to fulfill that purpose, current church history, how we are succeeding to-day in Korea, how we are failing in Africa—all these kindred subjects, if carefully related to our religious education plans, would give a more loyal generation of Christians.

EFFICIENT SERVICE

Missionary education is essential to efficient Christian service. Just as intelligent soldiers are necessary to success in battle and capable workmen to highest attainments in manufacturing and building, so efficiency is essential in the Church of Christ. The Church will never want to save the world until it realizes more fully that this is Christ's will, and until it couples with this conviction a knowledge of the need of the world and Christ's power to meet it. In our ignorance of the past we grope about repeating the mistakes of former generations. Here is one of the keys to the situation of our day. Men are saying that the Church is not onto its job, that efficiency is the exception and not the rule. We reply by saying that the critic does not know or is unjust, and in a measure that is true, but we also know that we could heed his word with profit. We should seek a generation of Christians who know and who know how. It is not claimed that missionary instruction will accomplish all this. The only claim made is that it will help.

CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

Missionary education is essential to the development of well-rounded Christian character. Convictions must be *in* the life to be a part *of* the life. We have been content to have a very small fraction of the Church inspired with missionary conviction, and we have been very

awkward in our methods of education. We have laid out a curriculum which we have assumed would build up a Christian character, and then we have said that if one wanted to add to this Christian character missionary interest, he could put it on something like a man builds a house and then tacks on the kitchen or a "lean-to." This is a poor way to build a house, and it is also a poor way to build Christian character. One-sided houses and one-sided Christians are sure to result. And the tragedy of the one is as much greater than the other as the value of a person is greater than the value of wood and stone. A well-rounded Christian character is the aim of religious education. It cannot be secured until missionary instruction is given its logical and rightful place in our plans for religious education.